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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 5690
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0518
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002479

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, November 6-7, 2008

Key stories in the media:

Yediot, HaQaretz, and Israel Radio cited a statement issued by PM Ehud Olmert after a phone conversation between him and President-elect Barack Obama that the two "agreed on the need to continue to advance the peace process, and this, while safeguarding the security of Israel". The statement said that Obama and Olmert

also "spoke about the long friendship between the United States and Israel and the need to preserve and strengthen this friendship." HaQaretz reported that a message from Obama will be delivered tomorrow at the 13th central commemoration for Yitzhak Rabin in Tel Aviv. The Jerusalem Post reported that QIsraeli-linkedQ Rep. Rahm Emanuel has accepted the position of White House chief-of-staff.

HaQaretz reported that Israel and the PA are to announce on Sunday their commitment to continuing talks on the core issues in 2009 after President-elect Barack Obama takes office. The parties have agreed to negotiate based on the principles determined at last November's Annapolis conference. HaQaretz quoted outgoing Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as saying yesterday during her visit to Israel that the U.S. would remain a true friend of Israel. Leading media quoted Rice as saying that the Bush administration will not reach an agreement.

HaQaretz reported that Iran has congratulated Obama over his election. The newspaper hinted that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is sending the U.S. the message that Iran expects change in U.S. policy. HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post quoted FM Livni as saying yesterday that that Obama should not talk to Iran just yet, warning that such dialogue could project weakness- - a first sign of disagreement with the incoming American administration.

Leading media reported that yesterday the IDF Northern Command concluded a large-scale exercise that simulated a double conflagration with Syria and Lebanon. The Jerusalem Post quoted GOI sources as saying that, in any future conflict with Hizbullah, Israel will likely cite the ShiQite groupQs increasing influence within the Lebanese cabinet as a legitimate reason to target LebanonQs entire infrastructure.

Yediot reported that President Shimon Peres and Saudi King Abdullah may meet at next weekQs interreligious conference in New York.

HaQaretz reported that the IDF has asked the Shin Bet security service and the police to provide it with information on left-wing figures active in the West Bank so it will be easier to issue restraining orders against them. Since the IDF does not gather intelligence on Israeli citizens, the GOC Central Command depends on evaluations by the Shin Bet prior to signing restraining orders. So far, such orders have only been issued against extreme right-wing activists suspected of subversive activities. This time, the army has focused on a number of activists protesting the security fence, those who help Palestinians harvest their olives, and others. This is apparently the first time left-wing activists have been the possible target of such orders.

Maariv cited the concern of senior Likud officials that Netanyahu may be eclipsed by LikudQs Qnew start.Q Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Kadima Knesset Member Zeev Elkin has moved to the new right-wing party.

Maariv devoted an entire section to the sufferings and ascension of the African-American community.

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, November 6-7, 2008:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: Q[Tzipi Livni] people's main argument is that Netanyahu's stances at his campaign opening, like refusing to negotiate over Jerusalem, place him on a collision course with the new Democratic administration in Washington.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QWhatever his game plan, if [Obama] wants to help foster the normalized relations Israel seeks with its Arab neighbors his administration will first have to sideline the region's number-one obstacle to peace [Iran].

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: QA new government should arise in Israel, which will also allow the U.S. President and the new [Israeli] prime minister, in particular if this is Benjamin Netanyahu, to embark on a new course.

HaQaretz editorialized: QOur trigger finger should relax. It endangers the people of Sderot.

Block Quotes:

I QThe Obama Effect

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/7): QBarack Obama won't be much occupied with the Israeli elections, but his image will influence the campaigns of the prime ministerial candidates. Each will try to spin the mood of the American upheaval to his or her advantage and try to tap into some QObama effectQ. Livni has the advantage of being fresh and unique, as a woman and the youngest contender. But as number two in Ehud Olmert's cabinet, she can hardly represent Qchange.Q She has the same problem John McCain had -- everyone knows she was Olmert's rival, as McCain was George W. Bush's, but they still represent the same party and the same way. The Foreign Minister believes that her support for a Palestinian state and the continued negotiations for a final-status agreement will ensure good working relations with Obama. QI've talked to Obama twice ... and he seemed to accept Israel's principals [vis-a-vis the peace process]," she said on the radio yesterday. A Livni aide adds: QBibi [Benjamin Netanyahu] may talk with an American accent, but it's the outgoing Republican administration's accent.Q Her people's main argument is that Netanyahu's stances at his campaign opening, like refusing to negotiate over Jerusalem, place him on a collision course with the new Democratic administration in Washington.

II. QObamaQs Agenda

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (11/7): QBut we think Obama can be smarter than his predecessors by homing in on this harsh Middle East peacemaking reality: As long as the Islamic Republic of Iran remains on the ascendant, there will be no peace between Israel and the Palestinians, no way to bolster Palestinian moderates by chipping away at the rejectionists, no treaty with Syria, and no prospect of saving Lebanon. So rather than going down the fruitless path taken by many of his predecessors, Obama might want to begin with a different set of assumptions. Since 1979, the chief obstacle to peace in the Middle East has been Iran. Break its stranglehold, and you pave the way toward progress on all peace-making fronts. No one need convince Israel that peace with the Palestinians is in its interest. Yet a deal that does not allow Israel to retain strategic settlement blocs will come back to haunt the friends of peace. The Obama administration thus needs to embrace President George W. Bush's 2004 letter to premier Ariel Sharon acknowledging that changes on the ground have made returning to the pre-1967 armistice lines unrealistic. Yet this is not an argument against talking to Iran. What matters is what America talks to Iran about and the environment in which QunconditionalQ talks take place.... Clearly, Barack Obama is too smart, too pragmatic to genuinely expect that talk alone will convince a bellicose, fanatical, and messianic regime with imperial ambitions beyond our region to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Whatever his game plan, if he wants to help foster the normalized relations Israel seeks with its Arab neighbors his administration will first have to sideline the region's number-one obstacle to peace.

III. QNew Goals for the New President

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (11/7): QObama will certainly be ambitious on the issue of the Middle East, and Israel must prepare for the new age. The correct way to do this is to disconnect from the line of diplomatic contiguity, disconnect from Ehud Olmert and Tzipi LivniQs Annapolis policy. A new government should arise in Israel, which will also allow the U.S. President and the new [Israeli] prime minister, in particular if this is Benjamin Netanyahu, to embark on a new course.

IV. Relax the Trigger Finger

HaQaretz editorialized (11/7): QThe Egyptian-mediated cease-fire between Israel and Hamas faced one of its most serious challenges this week:. Ostensibly, it can be argued that Hamas is the side that broke the cease-fire by digging the tunnel and intending to abduct soldiers. But was there a clear and immediate danger here?.... The cease-fire is an essential Israeli interest, no less than for Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. Continuing it has its price and is not without risks, but at the moment there is no practical alternative. Periodic attacks are not a solution to the risks, certainly not for the long term. Our trigger finger should relax. It endangers the people of Sderot.

CUNNINGHAM